

Ash Wednesday and St. Blaise 2021

Diocese of San Angelo

FEBRUARY 3: Blessing of Throats on the Feast of St. Blaise

Please keep in mind that this date is during the annual Spring Priests' Conference, when many priests will be in San Angelo in the morning.

For those parishes or schools offering the Blessing of Throats, it may be done during Mass, or in a celebration of the Liturgy of the Word, or during Morning Prayer or Evening Prayer.

It may be led by a priest, deacon, or lay minister, following the rites and prayers in chapter 51 of the Book of Blessings (paragraphs 1622 and following).

“If the blessing is conferred during Mass, the blessing follows the homily and the general intercessions, or, for pastoral reasons, the prayer of blessing may take the place of the final blessing of the Mass.” (Book of Blessings, no. 1626).

This year, because of the coronavirus pandemic, do not touch the persons with candles. Instead, give the blessing without the candles, extending hands over the assembly and saying the blessing as prescribed in the Book of Blessings.

FEBRUARY 17: Ash Wednesday

In 2021, because of the risk of spreading disease during the coronavirus pandemic, the minister is not to touch the recipient, and the ashes are not to be smeared on the forehead. Instead, throughout the world, we will follow the ancient practice found in Rome and in a number of countries where ashes are sprinkled on the top of the head. Cotton swabs or cotton balls are not to be used. This year there is no other option than the sprinkling of ashes on the top of the head.

On January 12, 2021, the Vatican Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments issued the following instructions for the distribution of ashes in this time of pandemic:

“The Priest says the prayer for blessing the ashes. He sprinkles the ashes with holy water, without saying anything. Then he addresses all those present and only once says the formula as it appears in the Roman Missal, applying it to all in general: “Repent, and believe in the Gospel”, or “Remember that you are dust, and to dust you shall return”. The Priest then cleanses his hands, puts on a face mask and distributes the ashes to those who come to him or, if appropriate, he goes to those who are standing in their places. The Priest takes the ashes and sprinkles them on the head of each one without saying anything.”

In the Diocese of San Angelo, we will follow those instructions. Furthermore, our services on Ash Wednesday (Feb 17, 2021) shall follow our standard liturgical protocols already in place in the diocese during the time of pandemic.

Please observe the following protocols:

- Masks must be worn over the nose and mouth by everyone, including the ministers, during the distribution of ashes.
- An instrument is not needed to sprinkle the ashes. The proper method of sprinkling is for the minister to hold an open bowl of ashes in one hand, and to pinch a bit of ashes with the thumb and forefinger of the other hand to sprinkle on the head of each recipient.

- As needed, the deacon or lay ministers may join the priest in sprinkling ashes on the faithful.
- Ministers are to sanitize their hands before the sprinkling of ashes.
- Ashes are always given by a minister. They may not be self-imposed, either in a liturgy or outside a liturgy.
- It is not acceptable to leave out a container of ashes in a public area for people to administer to themselves.
- Receiving ashes, while customary and laudable, is not an obligation of the faithful, so anyone who is fearful of becoming sick should not come forward, or even come to church on Ash Wednesday.
- In order to reduce the size of crowds at each liturgy, for the sake of safe social distancing, offer multiple liturgies when possible.
- If additional liturgies are needed to accommodate the faithful in light of reduced capacity in the church, the Roman Missal gives the option that the blessing and distribution of ashes may take place in a Liturgy of the Word outside of Mass. (If led by a lay minister, ashes already blessed by a priest or deacon are used.)
- For a Liturgy of the Word outside of Mass, chapter 52 of the Book of Blessings (paragraphs 1656 and following) provides a helpful order with prayers, readings, and intercessions.